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A Mountain Idyl

OR

The White Cliff Souvenir.

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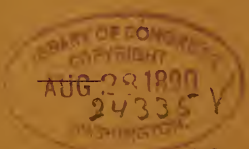
A MOUNTAIN IDYL,

OR

The White Cliff Souvenir.

BY

Rev. R. M. Tuttle.



For scenic beauty, health and rest,
The mountain regions are the best.

c 1890

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Preface.

The occasion of the following poem was a sojourn of thirty days, in the summer of 1889, with my wife and son (*to whom the booklet is affectionately dedicated*) at the White Cliff Springs. This watering place is on the very top of what is known as the Chilhowee range, which mounts up 3,000 feet above the sea, and is in Monroe County, East Tennessee, 16½ miles northeast of Athens. It has been a noted resort for many years, and for the last 16 or 17 seasons has been under the very able management of J. H. Magill, Esq., who justly enjoys an enviable reputation as a caterer for all classes of guests in quest of rest, comfort, and pleasure.

The essential features of the poem are in accordance with fact, and a simple reproduction of nature in a poetic dress.

I send the lines forth with the hope that they may please and elevate.

R. M. TUTTLE.

Comanche, Tex.

A Mountain Idyl.

WE awake one August morning
In a stately modern ark,
Rising proudly in the centre
Of a little mountain park,
And with very many features
That are worthy of remark.

We had dreamed of surging waters,
Topping lofty mountain-crest;
Of a human habitation,
Floating on the billows' breast;
Of an Ararat uplifted
For its anchorage and rest.

But, aside from dream or fancy,
Here's a mansion on the mont,
And palatial in proportions,
With a triple-storied front,
With its rooms, and halls, and porches,
And just everything we want.

Hark! a bell! a bell is ringing,
Waking echoes in the hall;
Then, anon, a band of viols
Makes another matin call,
And in measures aptly suited
To a merry evening ball.

So we rise for an ablution,
And a garb is on us thrown,
While the dewy air comes to us
With a freshness all its own,
And the breakfast bell is ringing
In a sharp, inviting tone.

Down one flight, and then another,
Of an easy grade of stairs,
We are in the large apartment
Where are served the choicest fares,
And the liveried servants greet us
With a drawing back of chairs.

Bright, and clean, and very airy
Do we find the dining room,
And the guests with cheerful faces
Banish every touch of gloom,
And the food is so abundant
None his portion can consume.

But the figure most noteworthy
Is our old-time, kindly host,
Ever present, and as watchful
As a sentry on his post,
And to deal out equal favor
Is his daily pride and boast.

Soon we test the healing waters
Scarce two hundred feet away,
Where the iron, sulphur, alum
In solution. day by day,
Issue out their pure libations,
And forever seem to say:—

"Quaff us, quaff us very freely,
Child, and man, and womanhood;
We are cordials for the weary,
And can only do you good,
For we purify the system,
And re-vitalize the blood."

Soft and helpful are the waters,
But, as well, the ambient air,
Pure, and bracing, and transparent,
God's own chemical so rare,
Is a very potent factor
In the body's sound repair.

Cheerful tributes, and most hearty,
To these elements we pay,
Ever present, ever ready,
Every moment of the day,
For our comfort, and our pleasure,
And to heal us, if they may.

Now we'll tell you of our journey,
Uneventful though it be,
All the way from pretty Athens,
Or the Eye of Tennessee,
Till we reached the ancient summit
Of Chilhowee, by degree.

To Chestua, eighty furlongs,
On the Tellico we came,
And a more exciting passage
No old traveler could name,
Than was ours with pony engine,
And an outfit much the same.

How exciting! whistle blowing
Every rod it seemed to me,
Brakemen running, bells a-ringing
As in deepest fog at sea,
All because they spied some cattle,
Or a rabbit chanced to see.

From the Station our conveyance
Was a hackney-coach and four;
Roads were heavy, steeds were weary,
Yet we climbed the foothills o'er,
Making once, but once a halting
At a little country store.

Then the toiling up the mountain
With the rock cliffs over head,
And below us deep abysses,
Reaching to an ocean bed,
With a roadway, narrow, winding,
While it ever upward led.

We arrived at last in safety,
At the hour of eventide;
Not a bone at all was broken,
Though well shaken by the ride,
And the warm reception given
Made us feel much gratified.

Mount of mounts for scenic beauty!
You can find no grander views,
No more graphic page of nature,
Or inspiring, to peruse,
And their daily contemplation
Would arouse the staid recluse.

Here we stand, as on a pivot,
Sheer three thousand feet in air,
With a view Kaleidoscopic,
And as wonderful as rare,
And as billowy in its outlines
As the stormy oceans are.

See the mountain chains receding,
Like a broken ocean wave,
Serried range to range succeeding,
Swelling up toward heaven's nave,
Till we reach the giant Smokies,
Arching like a nation's grave.

Amphitheatre of mountains,
Terraced up to azure vault!
Sittings for earth's myriad mortals,
And the gods can find no fault,
And a passing observation
Does our drowsy powers exalt.

How confused! In what a tangle
This whole region seems to one!
Knobs and peaks, and spurs and ridges,
In a jumble wildly thrown,
But the patient student of them
Sees an order all their own.

Mention not Sierras, Rockies,
Or the mountains of the East;
Here is grandeur the uniquest,
And for any soul a feast,
And, if one is unmoved by it,
We must pity him at least.

Far below us is a valley,
By the line, twelve hundred feet,
Hemmed and fringed by primal forests,
And with many a country seat,
And unfolding such a picture
As we rarely ever meet.

Now the solar beams are on it,
Lighting up the moving scene;
Field and forest, wood and clearing,
Covered all in golden sheen,
Form a very grand mosaic,
Like some patchwork we have seen.

From yon gorge, so deep and rayless,
Issues out a limpid stream,
Winding like a thread of silver,
Or a glinting, glassy seam,
Through the bosom of the valley,
And as noiseless as a dream.

On and on it still meanders,
Sinuous as a serpent's trail;
On through verdant fields it courses,
Traversing the dainty vale,
Adding beauty to the landscape;
And its waters never fail.

Hail! all-hail! fair Conasauga,
Name of stream and valley too;
From the height we look upon you,
Ever seeing something new,
Nor could Switzer be more ravished
Over any Alpine view.

Once, thou wast a sea of forest,
Traversed by the red man's trails,
Nourishing the game that fed him,
And accustomed to his wails,
But the veil is taken from thee,
And a harvest never fails.

It is morn, and very early,
And the fog is on the lea
And the valley covers over
As a smooth and level sea,
And some emerald islets dot it—
Here and there a verdant tree.

See! the day-orb's rising on it,
Crescent-shaped and very red,
Growing to a sphere of crimson,
As if from a gory bed,
And, though like a ball of fire,
Not a single ray is shed.

Scene of wonder! with a border
Of an azure mountain wall,
And we sometimes do imagine
We can hear the fogman's call,
While below it are the crofters,
And their little clearings small.

Now the sun is risen higher,
Showing forth a glowing disk,
Gilding all as if some goddess
Did it with a mighty whisk,
Changing fog to sea of glory
With a movement very brisk.

Look! the solar heat expands it,
And the fog begins to rise,
Turning to a troubled ocean
Right before our dazzled eyes,
And we seem to hear the breakers,
And the sea-bird's wildest cries.

All is now in dread commotion—
Billows upon billows pile,
Angry, foaming waves are rushing
To the shore for many a mile,
And we see the surges breaking,
Dashing up the spray the while.

Rarer grows the fog, and lighter,
Into cloudlets gathering,
And they, fleecy, soar above us,
Like a lark on morning wing,
Or, like white flecks from the washing,
To the mountain sides they cling.

Gone the spell! The vale is sunlit,
And the vapor disappears,
And our phantom, fleeting ocean
Flits like dreams of other years,
And we wipe away, unconscious,
Many now upstarting tears.

In the west king Sol is setting,
And a gala day goes by;
One by one, the stars are studding,
Up above, the azure sky,
When the mist again condenses
And the folds of vapor lie.

Wider, longer, and yet deeper
Does the robe of fog expand,
Till it covers, lake like, over
All the nether leagues of land,
And an inland sea we call it,
With its islands and its strand.

But behold! fair Luna rises
With her silver horns well filled,
And from her full face a radiance
On the grey mist is distilled,
When we feign a moonlit river
With its voice and current stilled.

Fancy sees a gliding wherry,
Or a slender bark canoe,
And in it a brave and maiden,
Going forth by night to woo,
Or to make a passage over
To the dusky hills in view.

Scene ecstatic! fairy haunted,
Sweetly muse-inspiring too,
Morpheus calls, but still we linger,
And each moment all is new,
Nor to this fantastic river
Can we bear to say, Adieu.

The kaleidoscope is turning,
And 'tis noon, a gladsome day,
And above, the flecks of cloudlets,
Intercepting each a ray,
Give us shadow with the sunshine,
And the two together play.

Hence, the scene is ever changing,
As we glance from peak to peak;
Now a home is wrapped in shadow,
Now is sunlit ere we speak,
For the light and shade, as children,
Seem to play at "Hide and seek."

See them chase each one the other
Rapidly from range to range,
Sweeping down to hill and valley,
Thence in backward movement strange,
Till the landscape is ashimmer
From the never-ceasing change.

True, a zephyr is a factor
In this rare, bewitching sight,
For Æolus oft is playful
For his godship's own delight,
When the atmosphere is looming,
And the day is warm and bright.

Yes, the atmosphere is looming,
And yon mountain side is flecked
With white vapor, very cloudlets,
And no movement we detect,
And they look like wild goats crouching,
In their spotless fleeces decked.

Halcyon day! the air transparent!
And we see with farthest ken;
Fringe of trees on distant mountains.
Every notch, ravine and glen
Stands out clearly, and seems to us,
Than before, as near again.

Why such frantic agitation
In the movement of each guest?
Storm! a storm it is approaching,
Coming from the north and west,
Aud the lips are pale from terror,
And there's many an anxious breast.

Down the sooty clouds are drifting,
Down the craggy mountain side,
And in pitchy folds condensing
Through the valley far and wide,
And we gaze upon the blackness
Near the hour of eventide.

Now the thunder's detonations
Shake the everlasting hills,
And the hoarse reverberation
Every frame with tremor fills,
And the sheet and forked lightning
Lights the darkness as it wills.

Long we look with consternation,
And with very deepest awe:
Scene of grandeur this surpassing
Surely mortals never saw,
Save when God to man was giving,
From the Mount, His holy Law.

How we feel for those below us,
'Neath that pall of murky cloud.
Where war elemental rages
O'er their heads with thunders loud;
Truly, many, many of them
Must in fervent prayer be bowed.

Night has thrown her veil upon us,
And the storm its force has spent,
And the argent stars above us
Twinkle down their sweet content,
While we cherish feelings, quickened,
Of the Power omnipotent.

Ah! how wondrous the Almighty!
Everywhere we trace His power
And His wisdom and His goodness,
And not only in this hour,
For His attributes are present
Even in the smallest flower.

Once, in our perambulations,
Finding a neglected plate,
We a moment paused to hear it
Its own history narrate,
And it did to fertile fancy
This bare modicum relate:

"Friend, I'm old, and much discolored
"And the ragged edges show,
"Though, as mirror, once was polished,
"And as white as driven snow,
"But I've lost the ring of silver,
"And the gloss I used to know."

"Many years upon this mountain
"Have I served the coming guest;
"Young and old, and strong and feeble,
"All have seen me at my best,
"And the food have taken from me
"With a relish and a zest."

"Jeweled hands have often touched me—
"Planters' daughters from the South,
"Yea, from every point of compass
"Guests have handled me in sooth,
"Bright and gay, and highly favored,
"And the polished and uncouth."

"Would that some fair hand would hang me,
"Kindly, on her parlor wall,
"With some wild flowers painted on me,
"And but this inscription small:—
"I'm the plate that often served you
"In the White Cliff dining hall."

Let us visit now a marvel
That in wonderment appalls;
Picturesque, sublime, romantic,
It is known as "Bullet Falls,"
And in wild and scenic beauty
Loud for admiration calls.

Here are walls of flint uprising,
Vertical, to dizzy height,
Crowned and clad with trees and lichens,
Shutting out the solar light,
With great bowlders at their bases,
Hurled there by unearthly might.

Through a canyon, deep and narrow,
From a mountain-terrace high
Down a stream of water gushes,
As if from the nether sky,
Sliding, leaping, roaring, foaming,
And its echoes never die.

On it rushes, booming louder,
Where it makes a sudden bound;
Here it chisels out a basin,
Where a crystal pool is found;
There it shoots a down a rapid
With a sharp and hissing sound.

Then, "The Falls,"—a sheer depression,
Dropping down full forty feet,
Over which the torrent plunges
In an ever-falling sheet,
And a thousand vocal organs
Could not with its voice compete.

From above it, we, in transport,
Look down on the magic scene,
While the brawny arms of laurel
Hold us as we over lean,
And to mountain spirit, truly,
Ours would seem a raptured mien.

From below it, we gaze upward
At the volume pouring down,
And survey the walls surrounding,
Bearing up their leafy crown—
Flinty walls of ages ancient,
Furrowed, battered, grey and brown.

Presently, a sudden splendor
Issues from the mid-day sun,
Causing changes the sublimest
In the objects, one by one,
And that torrent does not *water*,
But a stream of *diamonds* run.

Every globule is a prism,
And a pure, transparent gem,
And the rainbow colors shimmer
As a halo over them,
While around the sheet of water
There's a party-colored hem.

What a nook of charming beauty!
At our feet a glassy pool;
Rock-divans arranged around it
Offer to us sittings cool,
And the solitude and flora
Add enchantment for the soul.

Chiefs, perhaps, and painted warriors
Of the redman's waning race
Very often, faint and weary,
In this fairy-haunted place,
In the noontide of past summers,
Rested here from off the chase.

Scarce a change is wrought upon it.
It is as *they* saw it then—
Rocks and pool, and falling water,
And the wildness of the glen,
And the same it will be, doubtless,
To the future race of men.

Here we tarry with the feeling
That we could forever stay;
None of us hold friendly converse—
Not a word we wish to say,
For we would be mutely musing,
And be kissed by falling spray.

But the eye of day is closing,
And the sky has lost its fire;
Every covert gathers darkness,
And the rocks are weird and dire,
And with awe, and feelings solemn,
We reluctantly retire.

Up we climb, as on a ladder,
Up and up the winding steep,
Many of us so exhausted
That the limbs will hardly creep,
And the most part covet only
Food, and perfect rest, and sleep.

When above the giant stairway,
Clouds of glory meet our view,
And in forms the most fantastic,
And with gorgeousness of hue,
And we bless the day-star, setting,
For such magic ever new.

Charming sunsets oft are penciled
For our admiration here;
Can we look upon their beanty,
And the Painter not revere?
Nay, such visions overcome us,
And we feel a holy fear.

Night, the goddess, draws around us
Once again her ebon veil,
And we give ourselves to slumber—
Not an insect to assail,
And, without the heat of Summer,
We arise, at dawning, hale.

Soon the morning meal is taken,
And we start the daily round,
Breathing in the wine of ether,
Or the subtle ozone found,
And re-traversing the roadways
Of this old historic ground.

By-paths everywhere meander,
Hedged and canopied with trees,
And such ample walks affording
As pedestrians to please,
And from causes atmospheric
E'en the weakest walk with ease.

Aye, these mountain ways are lovely
Anywhere we choose to roam,
For Dame Nature makes her suitors
Everywhere to feel at home,
And she shares her gifts as freely
As the ocean wave its foam.

Do you love the ferns and flowers?
Here they are on every hand,
And the solitudes, unbroken,
Hourly are at your command,
Where the botanist may revel
In a high, enchanted land.

Ah! these hardy tribes of flora
On this elevated ground,
Many-tinted and ambrosial,
With a modest glory crowned,
Smile, and nod a welcome to us,
Wheresoever they are found.

In our daily forest rambles,
We observe a tender plant,
Which uprises in a night's time,
And a marvel is, we grant,
But about its growth and nature
Time is wanting to descant.

True, we say of it, "A mushroom,"
In our every-day parlance,
But to fancy they are altars
Round which roguish fairies dance,
And from which they sip the nectar
Furnished by the gods, perchance.

Here's the paradise of fairies,
And of all the elfin race,
And 'twould be a fine diversion
For one's fancy here to trace
Something of their life and travels
In this sky-uplifted place.

Come, Geologists, and wonder,
Here's *preadamite* forsooth,
Moulded when the earth was clearly
In the morning of her youth,
And time's ravages resisting
As Gibraltar has in truth.

See these rockeries around us,
Which we view with keen surprise;
Here the sharp and jagged ledges
Turn their edges to the skies;
There lie bowlders in confusion;
Here and there a tablet lies.

Over them we idly wander,
And from stone to stone descend,
Now reclining on their bosom,
Etching *now* the name of friend,
And they ready are to serve us,
And are patient to the end.

Could they speak to us in language,
And we knew their mother tongue,
They could tell us things romantic,
That had happened them among,
And could sing us touching ballads,
That in other days were sung.

Near by rise the stony turrets
Of this castellated height;
White and Black Cliffs let us mention,
Also, Bellevue for its sight,
And we scale them almost daily
With a mountaineer's delight.

As an eagle from his eyrie,
With a very lordly air,
Peers into the depths abysmal;
So from pinnacles we stare,
And survey the world below us,
And the pigmy objects there.

Down we look in manner listless,
Lost in reverie the while,
Or the eye pursues a shadow
In some distant, deep defile;
Or we hunt a *genus homo*,
Though we never gain a smile.

Ah! the silences oppress us,
  Standing on these frowning cliffs,
As out of deep seas of forest
  Not an antler's morning sniffs,
Or a bark of squirrel greets us,
  And we think a thousand ifs.

If a single note of songster
  Could but wake our stagnant ear,
Or a cow-bell's lazy tinkle
  Or one milk-maid we could hear,
We could bear the death-like stillness
  With a modicum of cheer.

Oft we sit, as would a watchman,
  On these balconies of stone,
Till the shadows flee before us,
  And the light of day is gone,
Gazing speechless at the landscape,
  Yet the gazing's never done.

We must not forget the City –
  Called "The City of the Rocks,"
Having streets, and for its buildings
  Hoary heaps of massy blocks,
And with Cyclopean towers
  That have stood Time's rudest shocks.

Fancy says, in ages early
  Anakim assembled here,
And their superhuman powers
  Put to tests the most severe,
Building turrets, and these bowlders
  Placing as they now appear.

Frequently among the ledges,
  On this mountain-top so high,
Find we golden-rod in blooming
  With its gold to tempt the eye,
And its gracefulnsss and glory
  Ever charm the passer-by.

As an emblem for our Country,
Is there any flower more fair,
Suited to the vale and mountain,
And so present everywhere?
Truly, none can claim more beauty,
Or the honor better wear.

Give the lily to the Frenchman;
Give the thistle to the Scot;
Give the rose to merry England;
But the go'den-rod we wot
Is our choice of all the bloomers,
Whether grown in field or pot.

'Neath the White Cliff is a grotto—
Cupid's it is christened, too,
Where a little alcove offers
Barely room enough for two,
And 'twould suit the most romantic
As a happy place to woo.

Roof and walls and sittings cozy
Are of pre-historic stone,
While some laurel decks the ceiling,
As a fresco o'er a throne,
And below it an abyss is,
Where old broken vows are thrown.

Doubtless, in the happy by-gones,
There have been espousals there,
For the gay and nubile couples
Oftentimes to it repair,
And the place is so suggestive
Of a marital affair.

It is said, or did I dream it?
That an heiress with her maid
Spent an *ante bellum* Summer
In this home of rest and shade,
And that here she met a tourist.
And a captive he was made

Young and fair, and gay and winsome,
With a charm about her voice,
Woven sunshine for her tresses,
With a heart that must rejoice,
And with dreamy eyes of azure,
She became his lucky choice.

Very handsome was her suitor,
Cultured, and of fine address;
He had, too, a charm of manner
That would any one impress,
And possessed an ample fortune
For a home without excess.

To the grotto, it is hinted,
They resorted day by day,
And, when Cynthia's horns were fullest,
They would nightly to it stray,
For it seemed a spot enchanted,
And they dreamed the hours away.

There futurity unveiling,
They forecast a plan of life,
Covenanting with each other,
That they would be man and wife,
And, in view of bliss domestic,
Their prospective joy was rife.

Soon the season had its ending,
And the new-made lovers part,
As do always the affianced,
With an almost-broken heart;
To the sunny South, the heiress;
To the North, must he depart.

Then were years of gloom and sorrow,
And no missives went and came;
War unfurled his gory banner,
And went forth with sword and flame,
And a once-united people
Battled in God's holy name.

But the cloud of war passed over,
And the dove of peace appeared,
And the lovers still were living,
And they from each other heard,
Though had gone by years of silence,
Since from either came a word.

Tried and true through years of sadness,
They at length were duly wed,
Though the heiress of her fortune,
Of her home, and downy bed
Had been robbed by war, red-handed,
And her loved ones all were dead.

Fortune favors the true-hearted,
And she smiled on these again;
Comforts came, and times of plenty,
And to wealth they did attain,
And the happiness they dreamed of
Entered heart and home to reign.

You have read of, here we see, him—
Well, the typic mountaineer,
With his quaintest of old folk-lore,
And his hunting coat and cheer,
And contentment sits upon him
With a very knowing leer.

Careless of his food and raiment,
Nature's simple, artless child,
Wedded to his dog and rifle,
Living in a region wild,
He is happier than thousands
On whom fortune long has smiled.

One, for instance, glibly told us,
That he made the passing year,
(And with boasting) *forty dollars*,
And that *twenty-five*, or near,
Would meet all the year's expenses
Of his cabin home so dear.

Then bethought we of the hermit,
Who did earth-born care forego,
And this aphorism left us:—
"Man wants little here below,"
And it seemed our rustic brother
Knew what all of us should know.

Far below our view-verandas,
Yet above the leafy sea,
On most airy wing the buzzards,
In girations broad and free,
Daily soar without an effort
That a practised eye can see.

How the pinions wide expanded,
Rigid seem as bronze ones are!
And we judge they could forever
Circle in the ambient air,
While we look with admiration
At the mute birds, sailing there.

Proud inventor, get the secret
From our feathered friends down there,
And prepare a car with pinions,
That will travel through the air,
And we'll take a passage with you
To the World's approaching Fair.

Sometimes, at the day's declining,
O'er the mountains in the East,
Like old feudal castles fashioned,
Poise mid-summer clouds abreast
And the whole is many-tinted
By a radiance from the West.

How the feelings grow ecstatic
Over such fantastic forms!
Yea, we marvel that a sunset
Leaden vapor so transforms,
And we gaze in spell-bound wonder
Till are fled the fleeting charms.

Time would fail us now to tell you
All about this famed retreat:
Come with us some future Summer,
And *your* heart with ours will beat,
For this cloudland will its glories
Ever, evermore repeat.

Here are guests from every quarter,
North and South, and East and West;
From Iowa, Alabama,
Jersey, Kansas, each some guest;
Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas
Send with Florida the rest.

They are here from many life-walks,
E'en the boy with cigarette;
Two are amateur artists,
Armed with pencil and palette;
Others are from trades, professions,
Simply needed rest to get.

All, indeed, whatever station
They had filled in life at home,
Find Edenic rest and freedom
Right upon this mountain-dome,
And in Summer, none would leave it
For Utopia to roam.

As for Sabbaths, holy Sabbaths,
It has been our custom here,
Morn and eve, to meet together,
And God's august name revere,
And to sing His highest praises,
And the gospel-message hear.

For we've had among us, resting,
Willing ministers of grace,
Who have stood, the Savior's legates,
In the high and holy place,
And have taught us truth and duty,
And the way to win the race.

To the pure and tonic water,
To the circumambient air,
To the many pleasant servants,
To the host and hostess fair,
We return our thanks in parting
With a wish and fervent prayer.

Here the lives of all, so precious,
No sore evil did befall,
Though there were so many of us—
Some so weak, and some so small,
And we owe our preservation
To Jehovah over all.

Praise Him, in the highest praise Him,
For the tokens of His love,
For our rest and recreation,
For all blessings from above,
And our gratitude, in future,
We to Him should daily prove.

Here I stay my pen in writing
Of this terrene glory-land;
It has been a work of pleasure,
For the heart was with the hand,
Thus to write in simple measures
What our eager eyes have scanned.

FINIS.

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